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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000630

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2016

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SUBJECT: SENIOR KUWAITI SHI'A CLERIC SAYS IRANIAN "REFORMERS" MARGINALIZED; AHMADINEJAD TO REMAIN

REF: A. KUWAIT 224

[1B.](#) 05 KUWAIT 5137

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reason 1.4 (d)

[¶11.](#) (C) Summary and comment: Senior Kuwaiti Shi'a cleric Sayed Mohammed Baqer Al-Mohri told Poloff in a February 21 meeting that Iranian "reformers" had been politically marginalized by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and exercised little restraint on the President's conservative policies. He discounted reports that Ahmadinejad's personal religious beliefs significantly influenced his political policies. He also argued that international pressure on Iran only increased support for Ahmadinejad and allowed him to rally Iranians around the regime by shifting focus away from domestic problems. Al-Mohri "ruled out completely" the existence of a militant arm of "Kuwaiti Hizbollah," a pejorative term commonly used to refer to conservative Kuwaiti Shi'a, and dismissed the possibility of Iranian-backed terrorist attacks in Kuwait. Al-Mohri believed his suspension from preaching by the Ministry of Awqaf was due to his recent "statement" calling on the new Education Minister to reform the educational curriculum by removing anti-Shi'a, "Takfireen" texts. End summary and comment.

"Reformers" Marginalized; Ahmadinejad to Stay

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[¶12.](#) (C) Sayed Al-Mohri, a senior Kuwaiti Shi'a cleric, told Poloff in a February 21 meeting that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had replaced most "reformers and those aligned with (former President Mohammed) Khatami" in the Iranian government with his supporters, giving reformers far less influence on Iranian policy. As an example, he mentioned Hassan Marashi, whom Al-Mohri said was "in charge of tourism" under Khatami and was a vocal opponent of conservative policies. Al-Mohri, who claims to have close ties to many of Iran's top leaders, predicted Ahmadinejad would remain in power until the next presidential elections, but would not be re-elected. (Comment: In a December 2005 meeting with Poloff (ref B), Al-Mohri predicted Ahmadinejad would be replaced by someone more "moderate" within six months. End comment.) Al-Mohri said Ahmadinejad was supported by "Iranian youth, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the Basij (a conservative "volunteer" corps created to defend the Iranian Revolution)," but noted that "these groups do not represent all Iranians." He argued that international pressure on Iran only increased support for Ahmadinejad and allowed him to rally Iranians around the regime by shifting focus away from domestic problems.

[¶13.](#) (C) Al-Mohri claimed Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei had "good relations," but avoided saying Khamenei backed Ahmadinejad's controversial policies; instead, he noted vaguely that Khamenei "did not

support all of the President's statements." He said Ahmadinejad and former President Rafsanjani had poor relations. Al-Mohri downplayed the influence of Ahmadinejad's personal religious beliefs, specifically his reported belief in the imminent return of the Mahdi (the Messianic figure in Shi'a theology), on Iranian policy. He noted, however, that Ahmadinejad was recently reported as saying he believed he would become a "martyr" in two years, a comment Al-Mohri found "weird." According to Al-Mohri, the political influence of conservative Iranian cleric Ayatollah Mohammed Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi is limited to his students.

"Kuwaiti Hizbollah" Not a Threat

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¶4. (C) Al-Mohri responded to a question about Iranian influence in Kuwait, specifically the activities of a group some term "Kuwaiti Hizbollah," by referring to members of the National Islamic Alliance (NIA), a conservative Shi'a political association whose power he said had significantly diminished over the past several years as evidenced by their loss of representation in Parliament. Al-Mohri "ruled out completely" the existence of a militant arm of "Kuwaiti Hizbollah" and dismissed the possibility of Iranian-backed terrorist attacks in Kuwait. "Don't forget, they ("Kuwaiti Hizbollah") are Kuwaiti first and don't want to lose their privileges," he said. (Comment: "Kuwaiti Hizbollah" is a pejorative term applied primarily by Kuwait State Security to Shi'a it considers to be militant. There is no political or religious group in Kuwait calling itself Kuwaiti Hizbollah. End comment.)

Al-Mohri Suspended for "Political" Statements

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¶5. (U) On February 20, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs suspended Al-Mohri from preaching because of a recent "Friday sermon" in which he addressed political as well as religious topics, allegedly in violation of an Amiri decree, according to local press reports. Al-Mohri said the suspension would be effective from October 17, 2006; no end date was given. He was unclear on the reason for the delayed start of the suspension. Local press reported, however, that Al-Mohri will be unable to preach as of this Friday. A letter sent to Al-Mohri by the Ministry gave the following reasons for his suspension: "addressing political, rather than religious issues (in his sermon); attacking government ministries; interfering in the country's internal affairs in an unsuitable way; attacking and not respecting historical Islamic figures; contributing to sectarianism and undermining the national unity; and inappropriately criticizing political issues and countries."

¶6. (C) Al-Mohri believed the suspension was in response to a "statement" he had made calling on the new Education Minister to revise the curriculum, specifically removing text teaching that Shi'a are "infidels" and lessons on Al-Hajjaj bin Yousef Al-Thaqafi, who he said was a "controversial Islamic terrorist figure." He said texts by Kuwait University professor Shaykh Bassam Al-Shatti and Shaykh Nathem Al-Mesbah were particularly offensive. Al-Mohri also called for the curriculum to include teachings on the traditions of Imam Ali.

Bio Note

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¶7. (C) Al-Mohri is a leading Shi'a cleric in Kuwait and the Secretary General of the Shi'a Clerics Gathering, a Shi'a

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political association. He is the "unofficial" representative of Iraqi cleric Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani and Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Kuwait. He also claims to

have close relations with former Iranian Presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani, both of whom he said he met on trips to Iran.

Al-Mohri explained that while many people think he is from Iran, his family is originally from Ihsa' in Saudi Arabia. He said he was "surprised" by radical Iraqi "cleric" Moqtada Al-Sadr's visit to his diwaniya (traditional gathering) during a recent trip to Kuwait (ref A), and claimed that he does not have any connections with Al-Sadr. He speaks fluent Arabic and Farsi, but no English.

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